

"Pastor and Congregation before God"

Acts 20:17-35

Fourth Sunday of Easter / "Good Shepherd Sunday" + May 8, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

What we have here is perhaps the first recorded pastors' conference. He calls for the Elders, or pastors of Ephesus to meet him at a place called Miletus. It must have been hard for Paul to make the decision not to go to Ephesus. Remember, he had spent three years there and had made many new friends and contacts. But he has a gift on his mind and wants to bring it back to Jerusalem by Pentecost. It had been something like 26 years since that first Pentecost after Jesus ascended; no doubt he thought it would be fitting to bring back to Jerusalem the love offerings from the scattered churches who had been brought to faith in Jesus by the Holy Spirit poured out so powerfully at that time.

What a great program it was! The Apostle Paul himself was the speaker. The section shows how the three different terms all refer to the same office that we would call "pastor." First there is the word "elder" which simply refers to the fact that a man who becomes a pastor should not be a recent convert, but should have some experience. Second is the word "overseer" sometimes translated "bishop" in the King James Version. That refers to the fact that the pastor has responsibilities for which he is accountable. He has oversight of the use of the word of God and the sacraments in the congregation and will have to give an account to Christ of his oversight. Third is the word "pastor" which simply means "shepherd." The main job of a shepherd is to feed his sheep, to lead them to green pastures and clean water. He also must protect them from danger and seek out the strays. You may not be a pastor, but you are a partner with your pastor. That is, it is God's plan to gather each Christian into a congregation so as to be in fellowship with other forgiven sinners and to be under the care of a pastor. As such, God calls us all to know about the work of a pastor and to support pastors. What is that work?

- 1. The faithful pastor serves with humility. “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility” (vv.18-19). Paul tired of telling of God’s personal grace to Him, how he was the chief of sinners that God had forgiven in Christ! We also know that the Lord allowed a thorn in his flesh to keep him from becoming too proud.**
- 2. The faithful Pastor serves with earnestness. He served with “tears” when he dealt with the people. They could tell that when he addressed them it was no laughing matter. To be sure, they knew joy in the Lord, but a faithful pastor carries out his ministry with appropriate seriousness and earnestness. “Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears” (v.31).**
- 3. The faithful pastor serves under opposition. “The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me” (v.23). Time and again we have heard of the plots of the Jews against Paul (v.27), and more and more from the Gentiles also. Such plots can be expected in our day.**
- 4. The faithful pastor declares the whole counsel of God. “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (v.27). The pastor’s job is not merely to share the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but to share the complete blueprint of the Christian life that flows from that certainty of salvation. In the Great Commission Jesus said to teach people to observe all things that He had commanded.**
- 5. The faithful pastor teaches what is “profitable”—what will really help people, not necessarily what they want to hear (v. 20).**

- 6. The faithful pastor teaches in public (v.20). I thank God for our public worship services and the opportunity to do the Bible Study on the radio.**
- 7. The faithful pastor serves by teaching from house to house (v.20). Some people don't like to be visited by the pastor, but we have Paul's example.**
- 8. The faithful pastor is no respecter of persons. Paul served both Jews and Greeks (v.21). The pastor is not to favor people whom he finds more likeable or who are more wealthy, etc.**
- 9. The faithful pastor preaches the Law. He brings a message of "repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.21). The pastor's job is to lead people daily to turn away from their sins. He is not to leave people comfortable who are deliberately continuing on in ways that are sinful.**
- 10. The faithful pastor preaches the Gospel. The second part of that phrase immediately follows the first and should prevail in his message: "repentance toward God and ... faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.21). Those who know and acknowledge their sins and want to do better are to be richly comforted with the Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for their sins. The Law is preached to prepare people for that Good News.**
- 11. The faithful pastor is completely focused on fulfilling the ministry he has received from the Lord Jesus Christ. "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus" (v.24). He knows that he works as one who must give an account.**

- 12. The faithful pastor sees his life mission as “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (v.24). This is his message. He is not in the pulpit to address current events or to sway opinion on the political events of the day. He is to announce God’s salvation of sinners in Jesus Christ.**

- 13. The faithful pastor pays careful attention to himself (v.28). He knows that he is weak, that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh are after him as well. He will spend time in the word and prayer, and he will seek to be a faithful husband and father. He will also try to take care of the body God has given him so that he may serve more effectively and for a longer life-span.**

- 14. The faithful pastor pays careful attention to all the members of the flock (v.28). He is like the faithful shepherd willing to seek after the one lost sheep.**

- 15. The faithful pastor serves as one placed in office by the Holy Spirit. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (v.28). Your pastor was sent to you by God; he is not a hireling whom you are free to hire and fire at will.**

- 16. The faithful pastor warns against false teachers (vv.29-30). Paul knows that dangerous false teachings will arise from within and without the church, and so it is today.**

- 17. The faithful pastor is alert (v.31), always paying attention, studying people and the circumstances and the word of God.**

- 18. The faithful pastor is content with the possessions he has (vv.33-35). You will remember that Paul did not make use of his right receive wages, but instead earned his own keep by making tents.**

19. The faithful pastor is a man of prayer (v.36). We can imagine words pouring out of his heart to our faithful God for these pastors he was leaving behind.

20. The faithful pastor is just a man. Even though Paul had seen Jesus, had performed countless miracles, he is still just a guy who is grieved when he has to take leave of these dear co-workers. He shed as many tears as anyone that day.

Wow! That is a tall order! If you ever meet such a man, please introduce him to me! No wonder one of the early church fathers asked, “Can a pastor be saved?” Thankfully, yes, but only by the grace of God. You can see why your pastor needs your prayers, support, encouragement, and, at times, perhaps even gentle re-direction. Without the Lord Jesus he would have made a mess of it a long time ago. He needs and lives under the pardon that Jesus Christ won for us all. He needs Jesus the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep, who also took it up in victory on the third day. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who continues to feed and nourish us with His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

May God bless us as we live and serve together under Jesus, our Good Shepherd! Amen.